

Busch magician is a wiz with tricks and effects

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By Jim Baker

You've just selected a card and you're watching his hands intently because you know something tricky is about to happen. "Keep an eye on Jack Be Nimble and Jack Be Quick," patters the magician as he shows you two jacks face-up on top of the face-down deck. Then it happens. Only you don't see it happen. The two jacks have suddenly and mysteriously vanished into the deck and have sandwiched a card in between them. And you guessed it—it's the very card you selected just moments before.

This is just one of scores of magical effects being performed these days by Sir Thomas of Interval in Wizard Works, a new magic shop which opened this year at Busch Gardens. The 21-year-old prestidigitator is Tom Interval of Pittsburgh. He beat out the competition in auditions last November to become the theme park's first resident magician in Wizard Works.

As resident magician, Interval, in medieval alchemist garb, entertains visitors to the magic shop with 15 minutes of his own magical illusions followed by 15 minutes of demonstrating tricks and effects.

The shop stocks some 500 magical items—tricks, props, books and the like—ranging from a small coin trick to a professional magician's guillotine. The shop also stocks the Tarbell course in magic, a set of seven books comprising perhaps the most comprehensive magic course ever published.

Located in the medieval English village of Hastings, the magic shop also features special effects, ghostly apparitions and animated characters. The shop itself is designed to resemble an alchemist's laboratory. The shop is located near "The Enchanted Laboratory," the park's computer animated magic show which highlights an alchemist's young apprentice's misfortunes. Park visitors who get bitten by the "magic bug" in The "Enchanted Laboratory" can walk across the way and purchase an illusion they can do themselves.

In addition to Sir Thomas of Interval, there will be another magician in residence and several other people who will demonstrate magic tricks for poten-

tial customers in the shop.

For Interval, working in Wizard Works represents the young magician's first big break in magic. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Interval became interested in magic at age 6 when his parents gave him a magic kit. With the kit and the booklet that came with it, Interval soon was producing smoke from his fingertips, making things vanish from a box with a drawer in it and fooling adults with the three-shells-and-a-pea routine.

Soon Interval began devouring books on sleight of hand, illusions and escape magic. (Today he has a collection of some 300 magic books.) He became fascinated with Houdini and magical escapes. He soon acquired more magical props and, at age 7, gave his first show—a living room performance for his relatives.

He became a professional at age 12 when he gave his first paid performance, entertaining a group of 6-year-olds at a birthday party for a fee of \$10. "Looking back on that show," Interval said recently, "it was terrible. I made a lot of mistakes and back then I didn't know how to cover them up like I do now...but the kids seemed to like it anyway."

Since then, Interval has performed on TV and in person for both youngsters and adults. He has done close-up magic, performed at weddings and parties, done Halloween and Christmas shows, and even worked in a magic shop in Pittsburgh demonstrating tricks to potential customers.

Basically self-taught, Interval learned his craft by reading books on magic and watching other magicians perform.

Interval's break came late in 1987 when he learned the Busch Gardens would be holding auditions in the Pittsburgh area. He showed up with a close-up mat, some sponge balls that magically disappeared and reappeared, a deck of cards, and a pair of extremely dexterous hands.

He obviously made an impression on the people conducting the auditions. "In late January," he said, "I got a call from Busch Gardens offering me the job here." Interval said he wasn't at home but the caller left the message with his mother that he was being offered the job

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Sir Thomas of Interval cavorts with some of his colleagues in front of the magic shop.